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Crowdsourcing

Sherry A. Czekus
The University of Western Ontario

Supervisor
David Merritt
The University of Western Ontario

Graduate Program in Visual Arts

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Fine Arts

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CROWDSOURCING

(Thesis format: Integrated Article)

by

Sherry Czekus

Graduate Program in Visual Art

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

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Abstract

The integrated article, along with an exhibition at Artlab Gallery, has three chapters. Chapter One is a comprehensive artist statement that examines my practice of contemporary painting and its relationship to visual and temporal perception and the disruption of it in urban crowd culture. Our simultaneous place in physical and virtual crowds as part of the everyday experience revisits 19th C. flaneurism and the act of seeing and being seen in public places through technology. Chapter 2 is the Practice Documentation consisting of a selection of images of paintings created during my MFA two year candidacy. Chapter 3 is the Case Study titled “Timely Landscapes” featuring Toronto painter Monica Tap. Her painting process engages the visual and digital perception of motion, temporality and the everyday commuter experience.

Keywords

Contemporary painting, Figuration, Abstraction, Temporality, Flaneurism, Crowd culture, Crowdsourcing, Urban, Public space, Monica Tap.

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Without the support of my family and friends, this milestone would not have been possible. I would like to thank my husband Karl for his unwavering patience and enthusiasm during my candidacy. And to my daughters Jane and Jennifer, their constant encouragement has been an inspiration to me.

I dedicate my work to my great-grandmother, Maggie Braddon Earley (1892-1964), who lived her life making paintings.

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Introduction

This Master of Fine Arts thesis dossier is comprised of three chapters that accompany my thesis exhibition which will take place at the Artlab Gallery at Western University from August 13th until 27th, 2015. The three chapters of this thesis include a Comprehensive Artist Statement, Practice Documentation, and a Case Study of painter Monica Tap. This thesis dossier, in addition to the artwork I have presented in my thesis exhibition titled “Crowdsourcing” represents the research I conducted related to urban crowd culture.

The first chapter consists of my Comprehensive Artist Statement where I discuss my conceptual and material approach to contemporary painting in the current conditions of urban crowd culture. My painting explores the temporal condition of social space through image making in relation to digital technology. Reflecting on 19th C. flaneurism, the act of seeing and being seen drives the perceptual tension that exists between the online and physical crowd. China ink washes on mylar and oil paint on canvas are two material processes where I explore the material expression of the physical and networked environments as we access them simultaneously.

The second chapter is comprised of my Practice Documentation. The images represent a collection of works made during my MFA candidacy. The works presented are China ink on mylar and oil paintings accompanied by the title, material description, dimensions of each work and include a brief description of the key elements of the work.

In the third chapter, the Case Study of painter Monica Tap titled “Timely Landscapes” explores the artist’s process of mediating digital imaging through contemporary painting. The landscape serves as a motif in Tap’s investigation of temporality and motion. Through her painting, Tap translates the effects of digital and human perception in her negotiation of representation and abstraction. The Case Study developed through my interview with Tap in her studio in Toronto in July 2014, research material gathered through an informal question period between the artist and Dan Adler, along with articles written about her work.

Chapter 1: Comprehensive Artist Statement

Crowdsourcing

‘And so away he goes, hurrying, searching. But searching for what? Be very sure that this man, such as I have depicted him - this solitary, gifted with an active imagination, ceaselessly journeying across the great human desert - has an aim loftier than of a mere flaneur, an aim more general, something other than the fugitive pleasure of circumstance. He is looking for that quality which you must allow me to call ‘modernity’; for I know no better word to express the idea I have in mind.’¹

Making my recent paintings begins with becoming one of the crowd. Passing through the mass of people, meandering through a market of fresh produce and walking along the streets of a large city centre, I am drawn to the current moment in which the urban crowd as a figure in itself is continually present. What underscores this moment is our presence in online communities that we access fluidly through networked electronic devices while being one in a physical crowd. I am aware of how people disengage from this space while checking their cell phones. The gesture of this physical-virtual being is marked -- head down, arms bent and hand together at mid chest, while sitting, standing and walking; the stance when one is one in many crowds at once. This interruption of the physical realm alters our visual perception and it is this sensation in our current urban experience that turns my attention to painting.

¹Charles Baudelaire. “The Painter of Modern Life” in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, 1964. *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*. Ed Jonathan Mayne. (London: Phaidon Press 1964) 12.

Observations of modern urban culture were first seen through the lens of the flaneur in 19th C. Paris.² The flaneur was characterized in the literature of Baudelaire as a man in the city who found beauty in the transitory nature of the crowd and the civilization of urban space.³ In “Fancy Footwork”, Rob Shields describes the relationship between the flaneur and the crowd today.

“The flaneur is out to see and be seen, and thus requires a crowd to be able to watch others and take in the bustle of the city in the security of his anonymous status as part of the metropolitan throng. The crowd is also an audience. Flanerie is thus a crowd practice, a connoisseur’s ‘art of doing’ crowd behavior.”⁴

In the tradition of flaneurism, I take video as a way of seeing to trace my passage alongside large and small crowds in urban spaces.

Video provides the temporal and spatial potential in the stills to construct my paintings as record of my mobile perspective along with the movement of the crowd. To examine the fleeting milieu of the city, I developed parameters for my project in which one-second intervals are isolated as a means to establish a chronological baseline. I approached the one-second interval by isolating 24 still frames from one second of video and photographing one second of video on the screen. The stills allow reimagining the interruption of the physical experience, the motion, temporality and dimension of the urban landscape. Straddling the boundaries of representation and abstraction, the perception of time and space in the urban environment is explored through the translation of video imagery into the process and materiality of painting.

² Walter Benjamin. 2014. "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire." (1939, trans. 1969) in *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins. (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press), 327-338. Walter Benjamin was a key theorist and literary critic with an interest in the work of Baudelaire and the development of urban culture in Paris.

³ Theodore Reff. *Manet and Modern Paris*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 24.

⁴ Rob Shields, "Fancy Footwork: Walter Benjamin's Notes on Flanerie." in *The Flaneur*, ed. Keith Tester. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 65.

Translating the images made from video at first seemed futile. The paint and the canvas seemed to arrest the sensation of motion I was trying to convey. Photographing the video eventually led to painting projected video. I projected a short video vertically on the wall and attempted to paint the figures and images as they moved through space. My process turned to China ink due to its transparency and thin viscosity. The non-porous nature of mylar paired well with the immediacy of the ink wash for the purpose of recreating the temporal environment of the crowd. The project concentrates on oil painting on canvas and China ink on mylar in a parallel study of materiality in the temporal environment of the urban crowd.

The ink wash on mylar work titled “Market” (Figure 1) was made in one studio session due to the time sensitive nature of the materials. The process of applying and then washing the ink away with water layers several moments on the mylar so that each moment can be seen through the transparency of the black ink wash. Traces of these moments become entirely erased leaving white areas on the mylar as a memory of their former presence. The space and figures I was depicting are not time-bound as in still photography. The images seem to slip out of reach. Appearing only through fragments of the moment rather than the complete scene, the works pass between representation and abstraction.



Figure 1. Market, 2014, Ink on Mylar, 22” x 30”

A lemon and ochre striped sleeve, sienna leather shoulder, vermillion woolen tassel, blue denim calf, gold glitter of a Coach shoe buckle appear at once now. The screen beckons. Advertisements, articles and photographs scroll through the newsfeed before I can refocus on the activity in the tangible realm as the pace of the crowd carries me along. The way we oscillate between the physical and virtual crowd further skews our perception of the moment as the call to the screen of the smartphone lures our attention away from the physical realm. Temporality and the state of continuous motion within the crowd poses paradoxical questions for painting. The temporal environment of the crowd and continuous movement in all directions simultaneously is impossible to take in at once. Any attempt to follow the direction of the collective motion from the beginning to the end within the mass renders the devices of linear time futile. Merleau-Ponty states in “Phenomenology of Perception”,

“Within things themselves, the future and the past are in a kind of eternal state of pre-existence and survival; the water which will flow by tomorrow is at this moment at its source, the water which has just passed is now a little further downstream in the valley. What is past or future for me is present in the world. It is often said that, within things themselves, the future is not yet, the past is no longer, while the present, strictly speaking, is infinitesimal, so that time collapses.”⁵

The movement in the physical crowd fragments the chronological sense of time as we slide between realities.

Painting creates a third space, as a way of intertwining physical space and the space of the network in a reimagined perception of the crowd experience. The paintings reveal the fragmentation of perception as the crowd steps between the physical and online environment. The past, present and future seem inconsequential in this moment. Christine Ross refers to a nonlinear sense of time in “The Temporal Turn in Contemporary Art” as a philosophical assessment of time. In her study of time, Ross suggests tenseless time

⁵Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “*Phenomenology of Perception*”. (New York: Routledge. 1958) 478.

does not follow a linear trajectory in the sense of the past, present and future. Tensed time is related to language and experienced reality despite the tenselessness of reality.⁶ The present moment eventually becomes what Ross describes as the past or before another moment.⁷ In her example of a video by artist Melik Ohanian, Ross describes a tenselessness that gives density to the slice of time or slice of space being observed; it contains a density that discloses his installations to be part of but also contestations of presentism.⁸ For Ross, nonlinear time, while not a clear path leading from the past to the future, holds the richness of expanded and layered moments that circulate in the present moment. In “The Painter of Modern Life”, Baudelaire believes, “(t)he pleasure which we derive from the representation of the present is due not only to the beauty with which it can be invested, but also to its essential quality of being present.”⁹ My painting explores the temporal condition of social space through image making in relation to the digital environment.

⁶ Christine Ross, “The Past is Present; It’s The Future Too: The Temporal Turn in Contemporary Art”. (London: Bloomsbury. 2012) 225.

⁷ Ibid, 223.

⁸ Ibid, 212.

⁹ Baudelaire, “The Painter of Modern Life”, 1.



Figure 2. Art Goers, 2014, oil on canvas, 45'' x 60''

My perceptual experience of the urban environment transits between figuration and abstraction nuanced through the materiality of paint and the act of painting. The colour contrast of paint, its thickness and thinness, opacity and density, layering and scraping away are material ways the medium exerts its influence on the image and the reading of the work. Layering a series of 24 images or one second of still photographs over one another on canvas in the work entitled 'Art Goers' (Figure 2) shows a literal depiction of linear time in the movement and position of the figures in an enclosed space. Another painting titled 'Suspend' (Figure 3) is an abstract work created from stills made from one second of video taken of a crowd in a public art museum. Depicting the way light and objects travel across the canvas in the density of the linear second posed valuable questions as to the position in space of the object in light and the perception of the object or figure as a whole. Linear time is present through the trailing light and remnant fragments of present objects. The way the paint becomes caught up in the tooth of the canvas mediates the tension between the speed of the movement of the figures and the slowness of the act of painting.



Figure 3. Suspend, 2014, oil on canvas, 45'' x 60''

The life-size oil paintings (Figure 4 and 5) portray a slice of the crowd with a view through the tops of shoulders as the masses of people move ahead. Once the image is mapped out on the canvas, the departure from the stilled video leads to an abstracted fragmentation of the figures. Signifying the notion that we see the figure as a sum of its parts rather than as a whole, the perception of the collective figures of the crowd disintegrates. Some areas of colour create a flat, shallow space while others are thinly washed revealing the ground. Objects are partially depicted left suspended in space. (Figure 4) The size and scale of the oil paintings relate directly to the life size of the viewer in an experiential seeing of the work as the figures approach and move in the direction of the viewer. Select details worn by the crowd members emerge in the paintings as a record of another moment in advertising and fashion. A handbag, a button, a pair of boots, a buckle and striped graphic prints are detailed in the paintings as they attempt to synthesize a particular moment of the crowd. (Figure 5) According to Shields, the flaneur is drawn to the visual: “Observation is the *raison d’etre* of the *flaneur*, and seeing visual lures is the key to the flaneur’s movement, drawn from sight to sight. The

visual could be said to be the *premium mobile* of the flaneur's being."¹⁰ Shields proposes the flaneur as consumer of the visual and is visually consumed,¹¹ a trend that continues in urban and online communities today.



Figure 4. Untitled, 2015, oil on canvas, 70" x 52"

¹⁰ Rob Shields, "Fancy Footwork: Walter Benjamin's Notes on Flanerie." in *The Flaneur*, ed. Keith Tester. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 65.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 67



Figure 5. Untitled, 2015, oil on canvas, 72" x 48"

With the turn of my canvas to a vertical orientation, the size of the canvas and the figures are enlarged to a human scale to produce the sensation of being within the crowd. (Figure 4 and 5) The position of ‘we’ and ‘them’ is one that fluctuates for both the participant and the viewer. The decision to step into or out of the work is the determining factor as to whether the viewer is one in the crowd (‘I’) or of the crowd (‘we’). Jean Luc Nancy in “Being Singularly Plural” discusses the idea that ‘I’ cannot be in a state of being without ‘we’; we have no meaning without co-existence. The meaning for our existence lies in the concept of community. Nancy suggests, “...the truth of this paradoxical ‘first-person plural’ which makes sense of the world as the spacing and intertwining of so many worlds (earth's, skies, histories) that there is a taking place of meaning, or the crossing through [passages] of presence. ‘We’ says (and "we say") the unique event whose uniqueness and unity consist in multiplicity.”¹²

¹² Jean Luc Nancy, 2000. *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Anne E. O'Bryne and Robert D. Richardson. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000), 5.

Nancy also notes that although we are individuals, it is exactly this group of individuals that forms the idea of ‘people’. According to Nancy, "People" clearly states that we are all precisely people, that is, indistinctly persons, humans, all of a common "kind," whose existence is defined as both group and individual.¹³ Without the individual, the group cannot exist and alternatively, without the group, the individual is without meaning, is the paradox that Nancy describes.

While Nancy reflects upon the relationship between the individual and the crowd and their dependency on one another for meaning and survival, sociologist Castells questions the possibilities for engagement of the crowd in urban spaces in a networked world. “The development of electronic communication and information systems allows for an increasing disassociation between spatial proximity and the performance of everyday life’s functions: work, shopping, entertainment, healthcare, education, public services, governance and the like. Accordingly, futurologists often predict the demise of the city, or at least of cities as we have known them until now, once they are voided of their functional necessity.”¹⁴ If Castells’ predictions about the future and the end of cities as we know them is true, then the influence of the social network will eventually redefine the crowd and threaten the existence of our physical social community as we know it today.

The present crowd lives in two worlds; a world of the past made present in the artifacts of society and urban architecture and another world that rides the flow of technological advancement. Technology is exponentially gaining momentum as society chases it for its lure of more, yet smaller and faster. Simon Pont in “Digital State” puts forth a startling reality about the invasion of technology on society and the body.

“Although we are living in technologically accelerated times, the social impact of the web will become evident only when it is pervasive, ubiquitous and invisible, a

¹³ Ibid., 7.

¹⁴ Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*. Vol. 1. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 2000) 424, 425.

tool used so intuitively by the generation that grows up with it that it is no longer a tool, but an extension of the self. Once it has vanished, we will know that the web has become central to how we live in and experience the world.”¹⁵

The body as a placeholder in both realms simultaneously, a contingent and temporal object, poses new questions for artists in light of the upsurge of the online environment. I explore the problem of presenting the dual reality of the crowd on the two dimensional surface. While traditional materials such as paint, ink and canvas are charged historically, painting allows me to take up the problem of presenting the crowd through the lens of technology that has not yet been determined by past movements in art.

Artists of the past engaged with urban culture through the lens of the flaneur. In our current culture we have an additional social realm that holds all the relevance of the physical world to negotiate what is experienced through the lens of both genders. I practice the act of flanerrie without assuming the engendered persona of the 19th C. Flaneurism, as personified in the literature of Baudelaire, has become a concept related to the observation of and participation in crowd culture. The emergence of the virtual realm adds to the complexities of the way we understand crowd culture, both visually and perceptually. Through the negotiation between figuration and abstraction and figure and ground, the canvas is a field in which I can explore the exchange of tensions in painting.

¹⁵ Simon Pont, *Digital State: How the internet is changing everything*. (Philadelphia, PA: Kogan Page Limited, 2013), 21.

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Chapter 2: Practice Documentation



Market, 2014, ink on mylar, 30" x 22"

The ink works on mylar sourced from video stills of crowd scenes in markets, art museums and sidewalks of main streets are overlaid to produce an image that contains a series of simultaneous moments.



Ascending, 2014, ink on mylar, 15" x 19"



Untitled, 2014, ink on mylar, 30" x 36"

The atmospheric conditions in the crowd in an outdoor urban space are explored in this work. In tracing three video stills on mylar, this work illustrates a series of moments that happened on a New York City street corner in Midtown Manhattan one rainy November day.



Untitled, 2014, oil on canvas, 40" x 48"

Taking a stationary viewpoint outside of the crowd is one position I use to video various relationships to motion. This painting is produced in reference to a digital image of video I shot in the market. One second of video was photographed on the screen using a one second shutter setting and the resulting image is translated on canvas through paint.



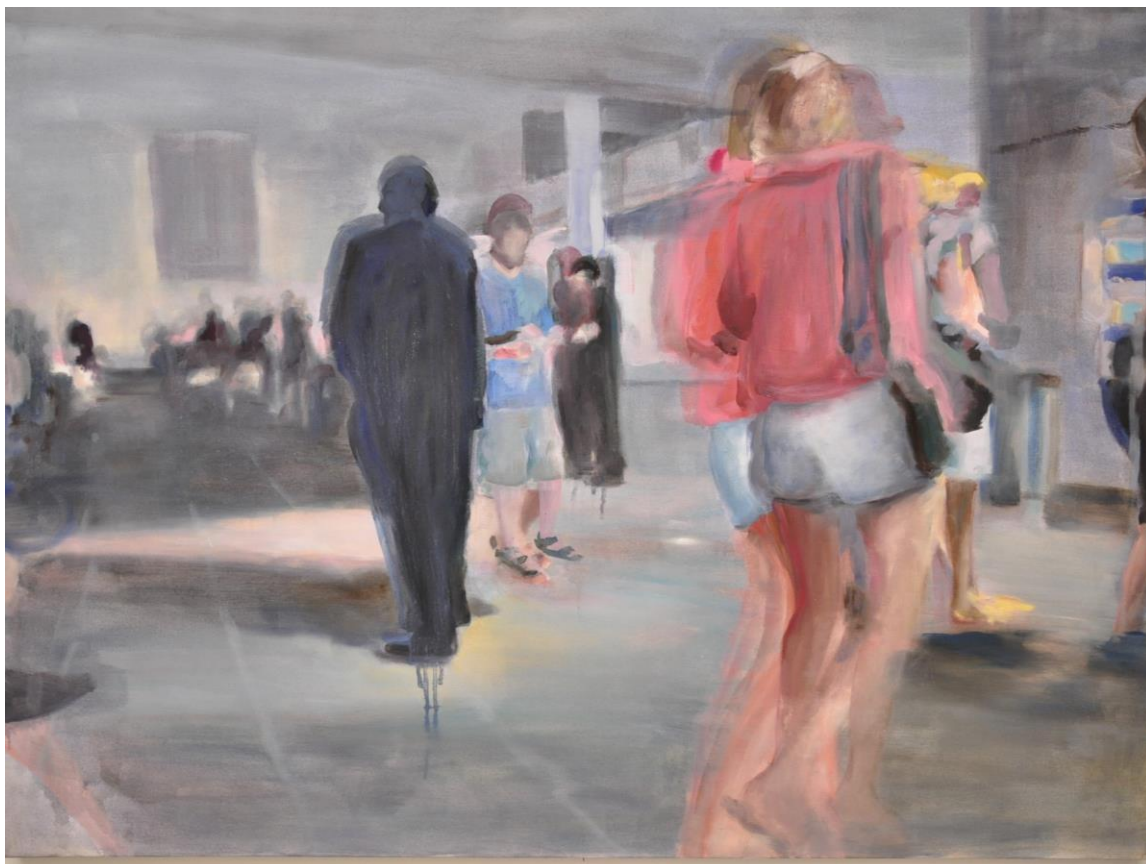
Untitled, 2014, oil on canvas, 45" x 60"

This painting, created from a photograph of video, represents one second of video imaging. The tensions between figuration and abstraction are examined through imaging various points of reference. The difference between the previous work and this painting is that I was moving through the crowd while I was recording the experience.



Untitled, 2015, oil on canvas, 30" x 32"

Three video stills are combined on the canvas and contain figures that move through the space in each of the overlaid images. The work is thinly painted so each moment is visible to the viewer.



Art Goers, 2014, oil on canvas, 45" x 60"

In a series of video stills, one second of time is depicted on the canvas. 24 consecutive frames were painted thinly on top of one another to reveal the moments beneath one another as a way of imaging motion of specific objects in the frame. The patrons are in the lobby of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In an un-cued type space, the dynamic motion of the crowd creates a field to study the movement of each figure.



Untitled, 2015, oil on canvas, 60" x 45"

This work explores the relationship between painting and photography in the manner that painting translates the capture of the solidness of the still object and the translucency of movement.



Untitled, 2015, oil on canvas, 60" x 36"

The figure-ground relationship is explored particularly in the foreground in this painting. A thin blue ground that forms the legs of the woman for example, is one method of portraying the intermittent visual perception of the motion in the crowds we inhabit.



Untitled, 2015, oil on canvas, 70" x 52"

In order to impart the sensation of being one in the crowd to the viewer, the size and scale of the paintings are enlarged to a life-size depiction of the figures.



Untitled, 2015, oil on canvas, 72" x 48"

The life-size figures in the crowd are fragmented to render the painterly interruption in the visual and virtual field of the urban crowd in a space that painting takes up through its physicality. Geometric patterns and objects of fashion catch my attention in the folds of the people moving alongside of me.



Untitled, 2015, oil on canvas, 72" x 48"

My attention is drawn to the way the crowd breaks up into a series of moving forms once outlined on the canvas. Through the merging of the figures and their parts, my exploration continues to drift between representation and abstraction in the depiction of the sensation of figuration.



Untitled, 2015, oil on canvas, 24" x24"

I make studies of details of the video stills of the crowd in order to explore the possibilities for a painterly translation of the ephemeral experience of movement in the video capture.



Untitled, 2015, oil on canvas, 30" x 30"

Chapter 3: Case Study

Monica Tap: Timely Landscapes

In this case study of noted Toronto painter Monica Tap, I will discuss the art making process and conceptual framework of the artist in her approach to the representation of motion through the lens of digital technology in the paintings she has created since the 1990's. Using the landscape as a motif, Tap explores the way movement is perceived through the lens of the camera. At first it may appear that Tap has an intense engagement with the landscape as a subject but the concentration in her works is found in the depiction of time and motion. The banality of the landscape along the highways she travels as a commuter has become the conceptual framing used to translate her theories of art making.

I will focus primarily on the works made for the series 'Six Ways From Sunday' (2012) and 'One-Second Hudson' (2007), two bodies of work that directly engage with the intermediality of painting and digital technology. This case study is developed from notes taken during my personal interview with the artist, an informal interview with Monica Tap by Dan Adler in her spring 2014 exhibition at MKG127 in Toronto, in addition to various publications and articles written about her work.



Figure 1. *Memento*, 2002, oil on canvas, 80 x 90"¹⁶

In “The Painter of Modern Life”, Baudelaire states, “It is doubtless an excellent thing to study the old masters in order to learn how to paint; but it can be no more than a waste of labor if your aim is to understand the special nature of present day beauty.”¹⁷ The mediation of Monica Tap’s mark making began in the mid 1990’s as she began making paintings of layered images of etchings by the Dutch Old Masters as an homage to her Dutch ancestry. Her aim was not to learn how to paint in the manner of the Old Masters as much as to gain an understanding of the type and construction of their marks. The paintings were produced by tracing the etchings projected on the canvas and each

¹⁶ Monica Tap. “Memento”, 2002. Oil on Canvas, 80” x 90”. www.monicatap.com. Accessed August 16, 2014. http://www.monicatap.com/artwork/memento_2002.html

¹⁷ Charles Baudelaire. “The Painter of Modern Life” in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, ed. Jonathan Mayne. (London: Phaidon Press 1964) 13.

was traced in a different colour.¹⁸ The process resulted in an abstracted image that still characterized the landscape yet emphasized colour, gestural strokes and abstraction. (Figure 1) Tap clarifies her case for her use of the landscape as she states in an interview in 2011 with Robert Enright, “(the landscape is) pliable in terms of how it can be abstracted and still be perceptually understood.”¹⁹ With the landscape serving as a motif, she was exploring contemporary theories regarding originality, authorship and its deferral. Appropriation, by way of making someone else’s mark by tracing projections on the canvas, was a way of merging the works of the Old Masters and contemporary art.²⁰ The mediation of this historical imagery was the conduit to the digitally mediated imagery in her subsequent series of paintings.

Tap’s mark making took a more painterly turn about 2005 due to a shift in source material moving from tracing projected images of etchings to tracing her own images from the video feature of her cell phone camera. Video, as a continuous field of pixels, required a different type of mark.²¹ At the time, the artist observed new media technology entering the realm of contemporary art, particularly in time-based work using stop motion. The artist found the stills contained within 30 seconds of video she made were “dumb” images: there was nothing there - no composition, no colour, nothing to work

¹⁸ Monica Tap. Interview by Sherry Czekus. Toronto, ON, July 31, 2014.

¹⁹ Robert Enright and Jeff Nye. *Another Roadside Abstraction: David Garneau and Monica Tap*. (Regina, SK: Dunlop Art Gallery, 2011), 35.

²⁰ Monica Tap. Interview by Sherry Czekus. Toronto, ON, July 31, 2014.

²¹ Ibid.

with.²² The artist embraced the limits of the camera and then invoked her own temporal and painterly interpretations towards a new pictorial approach. Her interest developed in sequencing and conceptual framing. Rather than editing the image to produce an aesthetic composition, she painted everything in the frame retaining the 3:4 aspect ratio of the video screen in her canvases. Tap's questions concerning the boundaries of representation and abstraction turned her investigation toward the space between stillness and motion.²³

Tap's objective was to keep the space active on the canvas. Applying paint and working with it while it was still wet and scraping and going back into the work was a new process for her. To compose her paintings, digitized video stills were projected on the canvas and painted one on top of another, mimicking her process previously used with the etchings of the landscape. Tap's intention ultimately became one of bringing a single moment to the canvas by isolating the stills, the outcome of which was the 2007 series "One-Second Hudson" made from images one fifteenth of a second in duration.²⁴ (Figure 2)

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Gary Michael Dault, "Landscape Capture Rush and Tumble of Time," *Globe and Mail*, April 24, 2010, http://www.monicatap.com/files/globe_review_2010-04-24_dault.pdf (accessed July 20, 2014).



Figure 2. *One-second Hudson no. 8*, 2007, oil on linen, 24 x 32 inches²⁵

Tap shot low-resolution video footage and still photographs through the window of a moving vehicle to use as source material. Rather than portraying a traditional aestheticized view, the pictorial space became clearly rooted in our current moment. Tap explains to Robert Enright in an interview, “The perceptual is key to these paintings. Trying to account for the technological failure of low resolution, 10 frames per second video to capture the landscape at high speed brings the pictures to a point where you can start to recognize something, a representation that is solid and understood. I like to keep

²⁵ Monica Tap. “One-second Hudson no. 8”, 2007. Oil on Canvas, 24” x 32”. www.monicatap.com. Accessed August 16, 2014. http://www.monicatap.com/artwork/one_second_hudson_08.html

the image hovering at that perceptual threshold...”²⁶ The paintings in the series “Six Ways From Sunday” made from video stills shot from the car window, depict a colourful interpretation of the view of the rushing landscape as Tap’s paintings shift between the pixilated and human view. Tap’s painting “Thursday” (Figure 3) however does not record the chronological passing of time in the way it appears to speed past us but rather presents us with an interpretation of digital capture of the sensation of speed. The artist reveals to Enright, “There’s an inherent irony in the video capture that I do. The first time I actually see the landscape is when I start to review it frame by frame on my computer. I haven’t seen it in the recording because we’re driving too fast.”²⁷



Figure 3. *Thursday*, 2012, oil on canvas, 60 x 100 inches²⁸

²⁶ Robert Enright and Jeff Nye. *Another Roadside Abstraction: David Garneau and Monica Tap*. (Regina, SK: Dunlop Art Gallery, 2011), 38.

²⁷ Ibid, 43.

²⁸ Monica Tap. “Thursday”, 2012. Oil on Canvas, 60” x 100”. www.monicatap.com. Accessed August 16, 2014. http://www.monicatap.com/artwork/six_ways_from_sunday_thursday.html

In her painting, Tap reproduces the conditions of the kind of vigilant perception that characterizes driving and the commuter experience. The speed of the landscape rushing past the car abstracts the detail. Clusters of flat areas of colour represent the natural colour of the scene and the atmospheric conditions. Negotiating between motion and stillness, she tests the effect of velocity on digital and human perception in contrast to the slow, lingering process of painting. The video capture through the windshield results in the layering of paint on the canvas that stands between the idea of the landscape and the painter.²⁹ The windshield becomes the filmic screen and the canvas. Shadows created by the glare on the window in front of the moving landscape keep the viewer moving across the surface of the paintings. The space is further disrupted by the shards of light painted as individual areas of colour that fragment the sensation of movement. She deliberately conceals the horizon in the 100 kilometer per hour paintings to accentuate this disorienting viewpoint. The disruption of the glass reflections and rolling motion in the foreground result in the inaccessibility of the painted image providing no place for the viewer to rest.³⁰

Through examination of source material in her studio, Tap negotiates the recorded media experience alongside that of human visual perception and memory. Without the use of digital technology, the ability to recall the details in an entire scene is impaired. It became apparent that because of the high speed at which she travelled she could not take in the whole scene. Technology is necessary to see something that was otherwise missed

²⁹ Monica Tap. Interview by Sherry Czekus. Toronto, ON, July 31, 2014.

³⁰ Ibid.

and so Tap analyzes the moments that have slipped past her during her journey as she replays the video. As a way of thinking about sequencing and “perception, she paints everything in the frame as it occurred. Digital artifact, where the low-res video image compresses the detail in areas of bright light or motion, fascinates Tap. Her process of mark making reproduces the fragments of time and the space one fragment occupies.³¹ In the painting “Borealis II (glare)” (Figure 4), the flatness of the white layers painted in the top centre of the work imparts a visual sensation of luminous abstraction in the way the sunlight pours through the trees.



Figure 4. *Borealis II (glare)*, 2012, oil on canvas, 51x 67 inches³²

Pixels and digital artifact represented in Tap’s paintings since 2005 can be seen as examples of what artist and theorist James Bridle has termed “New Aesthetic”. Bridle

³¹ Monica Tap. Interview by Sherry Czekus. Toronto, ON, July 31, 2014.

³² Monica Tap. “Borealis II (glare)”, 2012. Oil on Canvas, 51” x 67”. www.monicatap.com. Accessed August 16, 2014. http://www.monicatap.com/artwork/monica_tap_borealis_ii_glare_2012.html

coined the title “New Aesthetic”^{33,34} as a way of illustrating how the presence of digital technology has infiltrated contemporary visual culture. He theorizes that we now see the world through a digital lens rather than a human eye because of our increasing exposure to digital imaging and screen technology.³⁵ In the video documentary “Waving at the Machines”, Bridle states, “If you look very, very closely at these imaginary places you can start to see the grain of them, the outline of them which is pixilated, which is digital because these spaces of our imagination are entirely digital now. This is where we do our thinking. This kind of notional space is where we imagine possible visions of the future. That’s what these are.”³⁶ Tap has developed a kind of digital abstraction in her paintings in response to low-res image sources by translating the temporal effect of artifact. The image compression, particularly in areas of movement and intense light and darkness, has the effect of slowing down the image and keeping the image inside the boundaries of the canvas.

In the context of intermediality, Tap mediates the video imaging of the commuter viewpoint through the physicality of painting. As she paints the impression of the motion she experiences both visually and digitally, Tap sets the parameters on the canvas. To pace the movement in the paintings, she varies the thickness of the paint. At times, the

³³ The title of the project “The New Aesthetic” was given by James Bridle. The project examines visual culture in the age of digital technology.

³⁴ James Bridle, “The New Aesthetic: Waving At The Machines.” *Booktwo.org* video, 54:21. December 5, 2011. <http://booktwo.org/notebook/waving-at-machines/> (accessed August 7, 2014).

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ James Bridle, “The New Aesthetic: Waving At The Machines.” *booktwo.org*. December 5, 2011. <http://booktwo.org/notebook/waving-at-machines/> (accessed August 7, 2014).

work reveals the wash underlying the heavily painted areas. Sharp edges contrast with softly painted edges. Interruptions of flat planes of colour isolate portions of movement and light through levels of glass. Tap's preoccupation with the surface constructs a shallow space much like the space associated with her 'dumb'³⁷ video images.

Painted forms repeat in what Tap refers to as a stutter of the image as a registration of linear time through the work.³⁸ The forms that signify motion through the stutter effect are painted to direct the movement in the paintings. On close inspection of the painterly surface of the works, one can see that the artist is not pulling a brush across the freshly painted surface to create a sense of a blur. Instead, Tap lays down small areas of colour side by side depicting a digital rendering process mimicking the persistence of vision to create the cinematic illusion of movement. In "Picturing Motion", James E. Cutting reveals ways to represent motion and develops criteria in which to judge them from a scientific perspective. He suggests that the image would appear too static if motion was not at all indicated in the work. The reader of the image is required then to read the signifiers of motion and make sense of them.³⁹ Strategies such as multiple images, blur and vector lines superimposed on an image are indications of motion Tap uses to recreate the moving experience of the view through the windshield.⁴⁰ Within her

³⁷ Tap refers to the video stills as being dumb images, stating there are no pictorial or painterly qualities in the stills.

³⁸ Monica Tap. Interview by Sherry Czekus. Toronto, ON, July 31, 2014.

³⁹ James E. Cutting, "Representing Motion in a Static Image: Constraints and Parallels in Art, Science, and Popular Culture." in *Perception*, volume 31 (2002): 1169.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

conceptual framework of expression, her painting technique engages this intersection between digital video and painting.

The intermediality between digital technologies and painting underpins Tap's work. Paint remains the medium of translation. Still, why paint in the post-modern era? The artist explains that she is rooted in the history of painting. When interviewed by Robert Enright about "her involvement with the compression of time and an expansion of space"⁴¹, Tap replied, "Film has an indexical relationship, like photography, to what it records; whereas video uses these complex algorithms in order to make decisions – I'm personifying the machine here – about what matters and what doesn't, and what are the points of greatest difference. It will eliminate whatever information it can in order to compress the image sufficiently and still maintain a sense of what's there. That's not so different from what painters do."⁴²

In "The Logic of Sensation", Gilles Deleuze states that the entire history of painting is contained on the blank canvas and it is the job of the painter to strip away what is not needed in the current moment of painting.⁴³ Tap departs from the pastoral view of the landscape and reworks the terrain on the canvas to impart a modern observation and sensation of her commuter experience. Her process and its mediation through the digital lens produces a kind of aesthetic as she reconsiders the mark required

⁴¹ Robert Enright and Jeff Nye. *Another Roadside Abstraction: David Garneau and Monica Tap*. (Regina, SK: Dunlop Art Gallery, 2011), 43.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Gilles Deleuze, "The Painting Before Painting" in *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 71.

to produce the moving sensation she is after. According to James Bridle's "New Aesthetic", regardless of the source she traces for her paintings, Tap can only produce a digitized type of mark as he claims we now imagine the world digitally.

Deleuze states, "... the act of painting is always shifting, it is constantly oscillating between a beforehand and an afterward: the hysteria of painting ... Everything is already on the canvas, and in the painter himself, before the act of painting begins. Hence the work of the painter is shifted back and only comes later, afterward: manual labor, out of which the Figure will emerge into view..."⁴⁴ What stands before the painter is the white canvas and according to Deleuze, it's an object loaded with a history and subjectivity yet open to the possibilities time can bring to it.⁴⁵ Tap acknowledges and acts on the potential for shifts in the language of painting and their relationship to media that give momentum to her practice.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 80.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 71.

List of Figures

Figure 1. Tap, Monica. “Memento”, 2002. Oil on Canvas, 80” x 90”.
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Figure 2. Tap, Monica. “One-second Hudson no. 8”, 2007. Oil on Canvas, 24” x 32”.
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Figure 3. Tap, Monica. “Thursday”, 2012. Oil on Canvas, 60” x 100”.
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Figure 4. Tap, Monica. “Borealis II (glare)”, 2012. Oil on Canvas, 51” x 67”.
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Tap, Monica. 2007. *One-second Hudson no. 8*. Toronto.

Tap, Monica. 2012. *Six Ways From Sunday, Thursday*. Toronto.

Curriculum Vitae

Sherry Czekus

Education

2015

MFA - University of Western Ontario, London, ON

2010

Bachelor of Arts: Honours Fine Arts, Studio Specialization, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario

Selected Exhibitions

2015

- *Crowdsourcing*, MFA Thesis Show, Artlab Gallery, University of Western Ontario, London, ON
- *Eurospa Pop Up Exhibition*, Toronto, ON
- *Spring Show*, Paula White Diamond Art Gallery, Waterloo, ON
- *Periphery/Core*, Satellite Project Space, London, ON

2014

- *Sum of Two and Three, One More Than Four*, Artlab Gallery, Western University, London, ON
- *Big Ideas*, Paula White Diamond Art Gallery, Waterloo, ON
- *Fall Group Show*, Stax Gallery, Hamilton, ON

2013

- *Passing By*, 2013 Spring, Paula White Diamond Art Gallery, Waterloo, ON
- *The Square Foot Show*, Paula White Diamond Art Gallery, Waterloo, ON
- *Globe Studios Spring and Fall Exhibition*, Kitchener, ON

2012

- *Maggio Artistico 2012*, Juried Show, Kitchener ON
- *The Square Foot Show*, Paula White Diamond Art Gallery, Waterloo, ON

2011

- *Possibilities*, Cambridge Galleries (Preston Gallery), Cambridge, ON, with Maca Suazo
Curator - Iga Janik
- *Silicon W Group Exhibition* (September-December), Juried Show, Kitchener, ON
- *Maggio Artistico 2011*, Juried Show, Kitchener ON
- *Narratives of Violence, Narratives of Healing*, Robert Langen Gallery, Wilfrid Laurier University
(by invitation-alumni and faculty of University of Waterloo, Fine Arts Department), Waterloo, ON

2010

- *Toronto Outdoor Art Exhibition*, Juried Show, Toronto ON
- *The Square Foot Show*, AWOL Gallery, Toronto, ON
- *Selection of Five Graduating Fourth Year Works from Relative Proximity*, Region of Waterloo, 150 Frederick Street, Kitchener, ON
- *Relative Proximity*, Graduating Fourth Year Show, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, ON
- *Annual Juried Fine Arts SOFA Show*, Zavitz Gallery, University of Guelph, Guelph, ON

2009

- *Process*, Third Year Drawing student exhibition, Artery Gallery, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, ON
- *Brush With Art – Dean’s Gallery, Seasonal 2009 Exhibition*, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, ON, Co-curator and exhibitor
- *Centred*, Third year student painting exhibition, Front Gallery, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, ON
- *Annual Juried Fine Arts SOFA Show*, Zavitz Gallery, University of Guelph, Guelph, ON and Student Life Centre, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, ON
- *Available Space Art Project, Spring Exhibition*, Walter Fedy Partnership Office Building, Kitchener, ON

Publications and Media

- *Sum of two and Three, One More Than Four*, 2nd Year MFA Exhibition Catalogue, October 2014.
- *Canadian House and Home, October 2011. ‘Designer Face Off’*
- ‘The Breakout Kings’ television production set, 2010

Selected Collections

- Manulife, Waterloo, ON
- Delano Capital, Toronto, ON